



# Translating User Assistance Content



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## Introduction

Translating help and documentation content is an essential part of many product releases. But, getting it right can be tricky, especially when multiple languages and target locales are involved.

To help avoid the numerous costly pitfalls related to user assistance authoring and translation we have pulled together 15 essential tips in three categories that can improve the quality of your content and reduce your costs.

**This white paper will help you:**

- Simplify the written language to facilitate clear, concise translations
- Reduce the volumes to be translated
- Eliminate unnecessary desktop publishing steps
- Streamline the linguistic review process
- Avoid common and costly mistakes

## User Assistance Writing Considerations

Your user assistance content conveys important information about your product. Following the guidelines below will help to ensure that your messages are delivered effectively in your source copy and that your content is optimized for translation.

1. **Follow a style guide to keep your source content consistent and clear.** A style guide will help facilitate a higher quality of translation later in the project and ultimately reduce the cost of entering new markets.
2. **Develop a comprehensive glossary for all your user assistance that provides terminology such as product names, trademarked terms, user interface (UI) field labels, product button labels, and acronyms.** Once you decide to move forward with translation, this glossary will be a cornerstone for consistency and clarity throughout your translated documentation and your product. Make sure to indicate in your glossary which terms should not be translated (for example, product names and trademarked terms are not typically translated).
3. **Be consistent in your writing style to make documents clear and easy to translate.** For example, keep headlines and sub-headlines parallel (chapter titles are noun phrases and



procedure headings begin with gerunds, such as 'Creating a New User Account'). Use the same term to mean the same thing throughout the documentation. This can be enforced through the proper utilization of a source style guide and glossary.

4. **Include both metric and imperial units of measure.** The United States is one of only a handful of countries that has not converted to the metric system. This difference can cause significant confusion and costly errors if the units of measure are not clearly identified. Include both metric and imperial measurements in your documentation, putting the metric version first.
5. **Include international phone and date formats.** Because phone numbers and date formats vary from region to region, make sure that you display these formats correctly in your documentation. For example, in the U.S., phone numbers are expressed as (208) 123-4566. However, international customers also need to know the country code, which for the US is +1. Thus, displaying the phone number as +1 208.123.4566 helps your international customers. Conversely, international numbers often use a different format, e.g., German numbers are formatted as +49 89 636 33300. Likewise, many countries use dd/mm/yyyy or the ISO date format (yyyy/mm/dd) to express dates. So, does 05/09/2004 mean May 9, 2004 or 5 September 2004? Clearly indicate which date format you are using, or better still, spell out the month.

## Technical Suggestions

With well-written, easy-to-translate content in hand, we're ready to proceed to the technical authoring process which encompasses tools, technologies, layout, design and graphics.

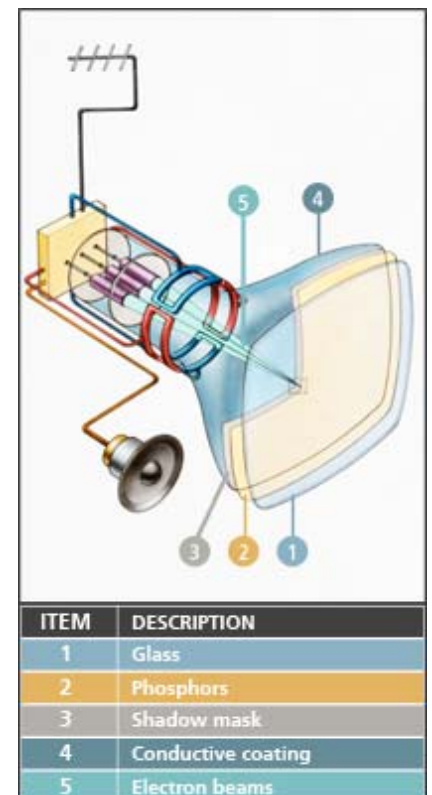
1. **Use Unicode compliant authoring tools that ensure your content can be authored and translated in any language.** Unicode is a standard for encapsulating textual content that supports all the languages of the world. Many older versions of popular authoring tools do not support this standard so check that the preferred tools in your technical writing group facilitate the use of Unicode.
2. **Consider technologies that repurpose your content.** Use tools and/or technologies that allow you to generate all your user assistance from a single source. This 'write once, publish everywhere' methodology, also called multi-channel publishing, can be used to create a printed manual, help system and even web content all from one master set of



content. This can create huge cost savings when translating user assistance into multiple languages.

3. **Create and use a template so that all files within a piece of user assistance use the same styles.** This not only ensures consistency in the English version, but also makes it easier to publish and verify the translated versions of the document. Having a template that enables effective translation can save hours of time that would otherwise be spent rebuilding or modifying a template. Also, many non-Latin-based languages do not use bold or italics. By enforcing the use of styles in your template, you enable the translation team to make necessary design changes in the style sheet for these languages.
4. **Use adequate white space.** Text can expand 30 percent or more during translation. Be sure to allow adequate white space (a minimum of a 1-inch margin on all sides) to accommodate this expansion. Ensure that columns are at least 25 characters wide. Leave extra white space in table columns to accommodate the increased length. Design your graphic callouts and slides with text expansion in mind. By planning ahead for text expansion, you can create layouts and designs that look closer to the original even after translation is finished.
5. **Understand how graphics and screenshots are a cost driver.**

- a. **Graphics:** Avoid placing text within images. If you must have text on an image, provide your translation team the source layered versions (Photoshop .psd or Illustrator .ai) of all final images that have text. Graphics for which the layered version cannot be found are difficult to modify if the translation team needs to alter the text for a particular locale. For example, if the final graphic is a JPG image, without the source files the translation team will have to recreate the graphic text, which can add 15 minutes to several hours of work depending upon the amount of text and the complexity of the background. Consider using numbered callouts on the image whenever possible and put text in a legend within the content area, as in the graphic illustrated on the right.





- b. **Screenshots:** Avoid screenshots in your user assistance if possible. Screenshots must be captured for every language. Each screenshot may only take 15-20 minutes to create and place, but you need to consider that the translated versions of the software are typically not available until the last minute and sample data is often not available in all languages. Creating hundreds of screenshots in each language for multiple languages requires a significant time investment. Consider using "fuzzy" screen captures where the look of the dialog or screen is conveyed but the text does not need to be readable. This will allow you to reuse these screens across all language versions. Also, you can try using vector-based line drawings of screens for certain types of products (such as mobile or medical device screens). The text in these screens can be edited with ease since they are really just layered graphics.

## Communication and Planning

You've identified the content to be translated, the language(s) you want and have selected a translation partner. A well thought-out plan, developed at the outset of your project, can save a great deal of time and money. When developing your plan, keep these things in mind:

1. **Notify your translation partner as soon as you know that you are doing a project.** Early information about the project helps the team plan and enables them to provide you with accurate estimates, resources and schedules. If the schedule changes or there are major/minor feature changes, keep the team informed so they can effectively adapt.
2. **Plan your schedule with translation in mind.** Because translation is typically the last phase before product release, surprises and schedule slips that affect the source product will affect the release schedule of the translated versions. As for how much time to allot, you should provide your translation partner with as much information about the project volumes beforehand so they can offer a time frame. As an example, if you have a 300-page document to be translated into 10 languages, your project schedule should reflect six-to-eight weeks for translation and associated activities.



3. **Invite both teams to the project kick-off meeting.** The attendance of key team members from both your content authoring teams and your translation partner is critical. This fosters an ongoing dialog and helps to set clear expectations. Provide contact information for the leads in each functional area and agree on a maximum response time for queries and exchange of information. Ensuring quick, accurate responses to questions reduces potential re-work, helps the project stay on schedule, and ensures that quality expectations will be met.
4. **Institute an effective change management process.** Changes happen. The key to successful translation projects is to evaluate each change for severity to ensure that it really needs to be made at that stage in the product cycle, and batching necessary changes together. Sending individual or last minute changes adds significantly to the translation cost, especially during the desktop publishing (DTP) stage, since the section being updated must be sent back through the entire process. For example, a relatively minor cosmetic change that would take three hours to make in the English version of the documentation, would be exponentially more time consuming when made in six languages. In this case, it might be advisable to wait until the next release cycle.
5. **Have a dedicated linguistic reviewer for each language.** Linguistic reviewers are vital to ensuring that the translated documentation meets your market requirements. While translators will be experienced in your industry, your employees and representatives have the product knowledge and understanding of company-specific preferences and terminology. For best results, your reviewer and your translation service provider's senior linguist will be in regular communication from project kick-off to completion.
  - a. **Who makes the best reviewer?** Look for subject matter experts who also have the language skills to review translation quality. Since an effective linguistic review takes time, performing translation reviews should be part of their regular responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Applying these steps and working with a talented translation provider will keep your user assistance translation project on time and on budget. Your end-users will thank you — and so will your translation team.

**Contact us to learn more about localizing your next project.**



## About Acclaro

Acclaro is an international translation and localization firm that helps the world's leading brands succeed across cultures. With its global headquarters in New York and offices and affiliates in Boston, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Bangkok and Paris, the agency translates websites, marketing campaigns, documents and software, giving clients an authentic voice in key language markets.

Since its founding in 2002 Acclaro has grown rapidly while maintaining a customized, personal approach. Acclaro's global team of technical and linguistic experts has served as a trusted partner to industry leaders and global businesses.

For more information, please visit [www.acclaro.com](http://www.acclaro.com).

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